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ABSTRACT

ProTech is the Boston Public Schools' longest-standing and most developed school-to-career (STC) initiative. It is a collaboration of the Boston Public Schools, 75 employers, and the Boston Private Industry Council. ProTech combines rigorous academic instruction, a sequence of worksite learning experiences in seven major industrial clusters for juniors and seniors, and additional supports after high school. The post-high school outcomes of 1993, 1994, and 1995 high school graduates who had participated in ProTech were compared to those of graduates who had not participated in ProTech. Responses were received from 107 (65.6%) of the 163 former ProTech participants who were sent surveys, as well as from 124 (26.9%) of the 460 graduates who had been eligible for ProTech but not participated in the program. The ProTech participants, particularly the African-American ones, were more likely to attend college than nonparticipants were (78% versus 72%). ProTech participation was also associated with a higher likelihood of having remained in college and having earned a college degree or other certification of postsecondary training, being employed at the time of the survey (87% versus 75%), and receiving higher earnings. ProTech graduates attributed their success to the STC program, in particular to the adults they had encountered while in it. (MN)

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SCHOOL-TO-CAREER INITIATIVE DEMONSTRATES SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

New research on Boston Public School graduates provides evidence that linking high schools with employers and other community allies can have a strong, lasting influence on students. The study is among the first to collect reliable information on college enrollment and postsecondary employment and earnings over several years.

The Boston Private Industry Council, with assistance from Jobs for the Future and the Boston Public Schools, studied the post-high school outcomes of 1993, 1994, and 1995 high school graduates. The research targeted students who had taken part in ProTech, a multi-year "school-to-career" program that combines rigorous academic instruction, a sequence of worksite learning experiences in the eleventh and twelfth grades, and additional supports after high school.

On the most important measures of student success—postsecondary school enrollment and employment and earnings—Boston's school-to-career initiative is showing impressive results. *Graduates of ProTech, the city's longest-standing, most developed school-to-career program, were more likely than their peers, locally and nationally, to graduate from high school, attend college or other postsecondary school, and have a job—and a job that pays higher wages.* Participation in this school-to-career program showed the most dramatic results for African-American students.

This research provides additional evidence of the potential benefits when a community organizes to create clear pathways from school to the adult world for young people. The results confirm and expand earlier evaluations conducted by Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national nonprofit organization that seeks to strengthen the transitions and linkages between work and learning.

National Significance: ProTech grew out of local circumstances and needs, yet it also represents one of the first programs to respond to emerging trends in the new economy that are influencing education policy and practice at the national, state, and local levels. It is a pioneering effort in the growing school-to-career movement to improve the way high schools prepare youth for the twenty-first century, incorporating hands-on, experiential learning techniques at school and the workplace and providing structured pathways from school to postsecondary education and high-skill careers.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

ProTech is a collaboration of the Boston Public Schools, 75 employers, and the Boston Private Industry Council. It connects high school students enrolled in career-pathway programs to high-quality internships in seven major industry clusters.

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School-to-career initiatives like ProTech link learning and work to make academic learning more alive and relevant for all students. They systematically bring business, postsecondary, and other community institutions into partnerships with the schools in order to help young people achieve higher academic standards, expand their access to postsecondary education, and improve their career prospects.

ProTech, which now enrolls 650 students, combines academic and technical subjects related to chosen career interests. Through a program of in-school and worksite learning, students develop 11 competencies, such as the abilities to use technology, understand and work within complex systems, and communicate and understand ideas and information.

To help it document and enhance the progress and impact of ProTech, the Private Industry Council sent surveys to 163 high school graduates who had completed the school-to-career program; 107 responses were received. As of June 1997, the date of the survey, the young people had completed high school 42, 30, or 18 months earlier. Surveys were also sent to a comparison group of 460 young people who had graduated in 1993, 1994, or 1995 and who, in the spring of their sophomore year of high school, would have met ProTech eligibility standards; of these, 124 responded.

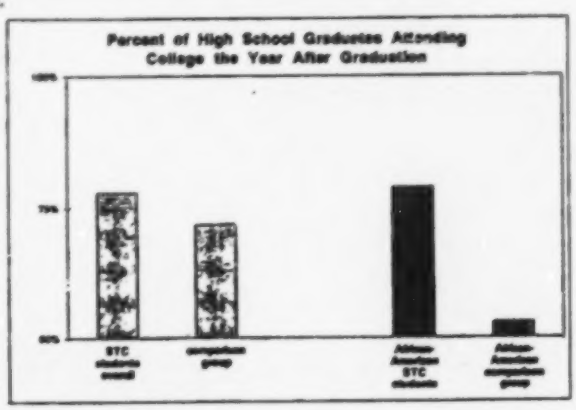
It is important to note that the research methodology probably underestimates positive results reported by ProTech school-to-career graduates in several ways. First, everyone in the comparison group had a C average or higher, as well as 90 percent attendance in the tenth grade; one-third of ProTech survey respondents did not meet those two criteria. Second, nationally, black students have tended to have lower rates of college enrollment and employment; the ProTech group had almost twice the proportion of African-American students (57 percent versus 30 percent in the comparison group). Third, the school-to-career group's response rate was much higher than the comparison group's (66 percent versus 27 percent), suggesting the latter was much more self-selective—and thus more likely to report only "good news."

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. School-to-career students, and African-American students in particular, were more likely to attend college.

A higher proportion of the school-to-career study group (78 percent) reported attending college the year after finishing high school than for the comparison group (72 percent). (Both groups exceeded the national rate for 1995 high school graduates—62 percent.)

For African Americans, this benefit of school-to-career was especially striking: 79 percent of black school-to-career graduates were in college the year after graduating from high school, a much higher proportion than for black students in the comparison group (53 percent) or nationally (51 percent).



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2. School-to-career students were more likely to have remained in college and to have earned a college degree or other certification of post-secondary training.

Of school-to-career graduates, 74 percent were enrolled in college at the time of the survey or had completed a postsecondary certificate or degree. That proportion roughly equaled that for the comparison group (73 percent).

Analyzed separately, 74 percent of black school-to-career graduates were enrolled in college at the time of the survey or had completed a postsecondary certificate or degree; the figure for blacks in the comparison group was 65 percent.

The research analyzed the 1993 class separately to indicate the impact of school-to-career on those young people who had been out of high school the longest. In this analysis, 64 percent of ProTech graduates had completed a postsecondary certificate or degree four years after graduation, a full 20 points higher than the figure for the comparison group (44 percent).

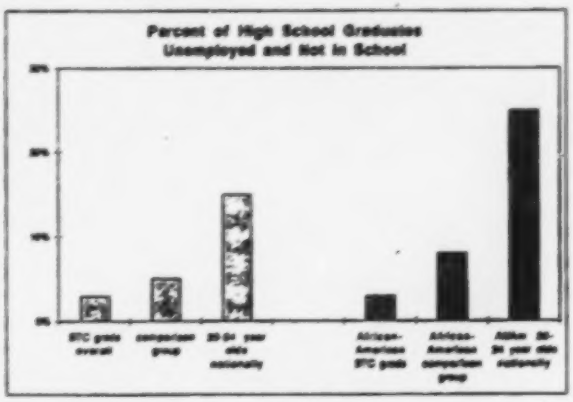
Moreover, 1993 school-to-career graduates who had not completed college were more likely to be in college at the time of the survey. About half of those who had not completed a certificate or degree were in college at the time of the survey, in contrast to two-fifths of the comparison group.

3. School-to-career students were more likely than their peers to be working.

According to the survey, 87 percent of ProTech graduates had jobs as of June 1997, a higher proportion than for the comparison group (75 percent). (For youth aged 20-24 nationally, it was 71 percent.)

Conversely, only 3 percent of school-to-career graduates were not employed and not in school. The figure was 5 percent for the comparison group. (Nationally, that figure is 23 percent of 20-24 year olds.)

Similarly, 3 percent of black school-to-career graduates were not employed and not in school, the same figure as for the survey sample as a whole. The black unemployment rate in the comparison group was 8 percent. (The national figure for black youth aged 20-24 was 34 percent.)



4. School-to-career appeared to improve the earnings of young people.

School-to-career graduates reported higher wages than did young people in the comparison group. The mean hourly wage for school-to-career graduates was $8.92 ($8.10 for the comparison group). Among working school-to-career graduates who were not in college, the mean wage was $9.68 ($8.56 for the comparison group). ProTech students who went on to earn a postsecondary certificate or degree had a mean wage of $9.19 ($8.63 for the comparison group).

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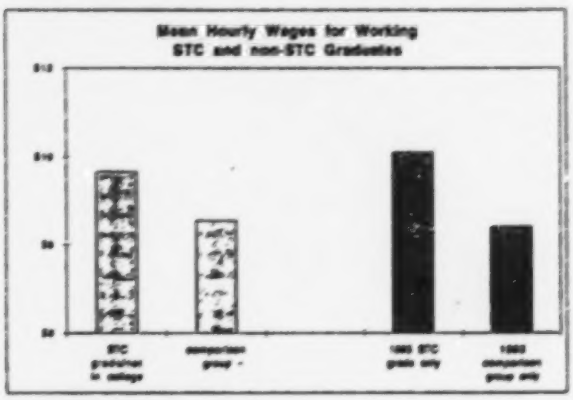
The largest reported wage differences were for 1993 school-to-career graduates. Their mean hourly wage was more than a dollar and a half higher than for the comparison group ($10.10 versus $8.42).

The earnings of black school-to-career graduates who were enrolled in college and employed were one-fifth higher than their peers. The school-to-career mean wage was $8.17 versus $6.77 for the comparison group black students. The mean wage for black school-to-career graduates who were working but not in college was $9.00 versus $8.42 for the comparison group.



5. ProTech graduates attributed their success to the school-to-career program, in particular to adults they had encountered in it.

The Private Industry Council survey asked students to rate the influence of school-to-career on their enrollment in postsecondary training. Over 89 percent of respondents answered that school-to-career was somewhat to greatly influential.

They survey also listed people who might have influenced a student, asking students to rate the influence of each one. The students rated their mothers, the Private Industry Council's ProTech coordinators, and the private sector worksite supervisors as most influential.

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About the Boston Private Industry Council

The Private Industry Council (PIC) is a business-led alliance of executives, educators, labor and community leaders, and government officials working to bring education, training, and employment opportunities to all Boston residents. The PIC's mission is to connect youth and adults with careers in the mainstream economy.

For more information about ProTech, contact the Private Industry Council at (617)423-3755.

About Jobs for the Future and Its Role in ProTech

Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national non-profit organization, works to enhance economic security and access to opportunity for all individuals by strengthening the transitions and linkages between learning and work.

JFF has provided technical assistance to ProTech since the program began in 1991. To ensure the rigor of work placements for students in career pathways, JFF helped Boston develop learning plans which address the competencies needed to succeed in the workplace, college, and life. JFF has also conducted several formal evaluations of ProTech, providing feedback that helps all partners reach their goals. This year, the Private Industry Council has taken over that evaluation role, with JFF providing extensive technical support.

Jobs for the Future also documents innovative programs such as ProTech and helps to disseminate such models nationally. JFF is currently working in close partnership with Boston and four other school districts (Louisville, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and North Clackamas, Oregon) in the Benchmark Communities Initiative. This effort is applying the insights of pioneering school-to-career programs to the task of school-wide and district-wide education reform. Beginning this summer, Jobs for the Future's new Connected Learning Communities Initiative will advance the progress these districts have achieved, while expanding the efforts to new sites.

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